

## Celebrating the Federal Junior Duck Stamp Program at Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge

Surrounded by fields of goldenrod and native grasses, refuge staff, volunteers, partners and visitors gathered early morning at the edge of Trustom Pond, Rhode Island's only undeveloped coastal pond. With ducks calling in the background, Sheree Ross, the Rhode Island Federal Junior Duck Stamp (FJDS) Coordinator welcomed guests and officially kicked off the 2011 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest. Ms. Ross spoke how the contest recognizes the conservation efforts of young people and support environmental and conservation education programs in the United States. Last year the nationwide FJDS Program received over 28,000 entries. "This year Rhode Island received 803 entries, almost 300 more than last year! Let's spread the word throughout Rhode Island and receive 300 more entries this coming year too!" said Ms. Ross. Sheree then introduced Miri Kim, Rhode Island's Best of Show and nationally Third Place winner who spoke of her experience in the contest. "The Junior Duck Stamp Program has become an important part of my life. This contest has made me take a greater interest in wildlife," said Miri. Ms. Kim went on to say the Duck Stamp Contest has been a fun and educational contest and a learning process that has been a great experience.

The celebration was also in honor of long time volunteer, Beverly Lavalley, who was selected as the first National Volunteer of the Year Award by the FJDS Office. Beverly was presented with an engraved crystal bowl and special recognition citations from U.S. Congressman James Langevin and U. S. Senator Jack Reed. Among her many volunteer duties, Beverly assisted with the judging process and made calls to the parents of Rhode Island's one hundred winning artists, notifying them of the details for the award ceremony. She provided visitor assistance at the JDS ceremony, passed out programs, and manned a Friends table top display showcasing environmental education materials. Beverly provided guidance and support to Sheree Ross throughout her first year working with the program. Beverly helped to guide and gave support to all volunteers to ensure a challenging year of change. Beverly has volunteered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for ten years and approximately 4,200 hours. "I love volunteering for the refuges and I think everyone should do it and if you are interested, please get with Sarah Lang, our new Volunteer Coordinator – she is standing right back there," Beverly said as she pointed to Ms. Lang.

The celebration continued with a duck banding demonstration by Joshua Beuth, a wildlife technician with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Division of Fish and Wildlife. With great passion about his work, Joshua talked about the importance of banding ducks and how this information is used for research and management of waterfowl populations. "Banding at Trustom Refuge is great because of the diversity of birds present. During our efforts we caught and banded American Wigeon, American black ducks, mallards, Blue-winged teal, Green-winged teal, wood ducks. We also banded Canada geese during our summer banding efforts" said Joshua.

To visitors' excitement, Joshua took out a young Wood Duck hen to band that he had captured earlier in the morning. He showed folks how you can age a juvenile duck by looking at the tip of their tail feathers to see if they have a v notch. "Adults birds have rounded or pointed tips on their tail feathers, this hen has v-notches at the tips, making her a juvenile", said Joshua. Mr. Beuth also talked about banding a good number of Blue-winged teal on Trustom. "It was the only place that we caught Blue-winged teal, however, it was the only place that we trapped that had adequate teal habitat. Catching the teal was a great addition because Blue-winged teal typically migrate earlier in the season and are less common in this region," said Joshua. While

the pond currently hosts a great diversity of birds, Joshua noted that “as the temperatures continue to drop, the diversity of water birds will continue to grow as other dabblers and divers take up residence in Trustom Pond for the winter season.”

Janis Nepshinsky, visitor services manager spoke of the refuge’s management work and studies that make Trustom Pond a great habitat for water birds. She pointed out work to control the invasive common reed, *Phragmites*, which nearly bordered the pond completely. *Phragmites* displace native marsh plants, reducing nesting areas for birds such as the green-winged teal, marsh wren and rails. Native plants such as cattails and umbrella sedge are great teal habitat and can increase breeding success. Just as Ms. Nepshinsky was pointing out the plants, an American bittern that was secretly hiding in the nearby cattails rose to fly overhead!

Refuge biologist Erin King talked on how Trustom Pond supports a diverse group of migratory birds throughout the year, including thousands of waterfowl during the winter months. Ms. King said that staff and conservation partners are monitoring the water, plant life and fish population to learn more about the ecology of the pond. One such partner is the University of Rhode Island, whose students demonstrated seining techniques and identified fish living in the pond. “Monitoring will help guide our management of Rhode Island’s only undeveloped coastal pond for the benefit of wildlife and plants,” said Ms. King.

As visitors were about to head back on the trail, fifteen snow geese, including a blue morph, the blue goose symbol of the refuge system, gracefully landed in the protected waters of Trustom Pond. Needless to say, it was an inspiring morning and a great way to celebrate the ducks!



Joshua Beuth, RIDEM's Wildlife Technician and Beverly Lavalley, National Volunteer Award Winner by FJDS Office, holding banded wood duck hen. (USFWS, Trustom Pond NWR)



Beverly Lavallee, National Volunteer of the Year Awarded by the FJDS Office, Miri Kim, National Third Place Winner - RI's Best of Show Winner, and Sheree Ross, RI FJDS Coordinator, standing near Trustom Pond, a great habitat for ducks! (USFWS, Trustom Pond NWR)



A diverse group of visitors, children, grandparents, University students, birders and volunteers, attended the celebration. (USFWS, Trustom Pond NWR)



Joshua Beuth, State's Wildlife Technician, retrieves wood duck hen for banding from holding cage - notice the close location of event to Trustom Pond. (USFWS, Trustom Pond NWR)



Younger birder could hardly contain himself as ducks landed on the nearby Trustom Pond. He had his binoculars ready! (USFWS, Trustom Pond NWR)



Miri Kim, RI Best of Show Winner and national Third Place Winner holding banded wood duck. (USFWS, Trustum Pond NWR)